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Question of Palestine

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Identical letters dated 8 September 2015 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I write to you upon instructions from President Mahmoud Abbas with regard to an issue of utmost priority for the Palestinian people and their leadership, namely, the plight of the Palestine refugees.

As conflict and upheaval continue to plague the region, the suffering of the Palestine refugees has markedly intensified, as they are among the millions of civilians that have been severely affected by the spreading instability, particularly as a result of the crisis in Syria and the spillover effect in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and elsewhere in the region. In the midst of this turmoil, Palestine refugee men, women and children have been enduring death, injury, starvation, destruction of their homes and communities, repeated displacement and dispossession, and drowning and death in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea as they have tried to escape the conflict and the human insecurity, poverty and endless suffering it has inflicted on so many innocent civilians.

The tragedy of the Palestine refugees from the Yarmouk refugee camp, in particular, reflected in shocking terms the extent of the misery being suffered by the Palestine refugees throughout Syria during the years of this crisis, with every single refugee camp impacted by the war. While it is estimated that approximately 80,000 Palestine refugees have fled Syria, seeking refuge primarily in neighbouring countries, at least 480,000 Palestine refugees remain in Syria, with more than half displaced from their refugee camps and 95 per cent in need of humanitarian assistance for their basic and daily survival. In this regard, we reiterate our gratitude to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for the valiant efforts that continue to be undertaken to provide the Palestine refugees with emergency food, shelter and medical aid, as well as

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continuity of education, despite the dangerous situation prevailing on the ground, and to reaffirm also our gratitude to the donor community for their response to this emergency and rising needs, helping to alleviate the plight of the refugees to the extent possible under these most difficult circumstances.

Such assistance, however, cannot mitigate the real dangers being faced by innocent and defenceless civilians caught in the middle of this horrific conflict. It is in this grave context that President Abbas and the Palestinian leadership have issued urgent calls to all members of the international community, in particular the United Nations, to support our efforts to bring Palestine refugees to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Rather than being forced to flee in desperation to neighbouring countries or to attempt the treacherous journey to leave the Middle East region entirely in search of safety, stability and livelihoods, the Palestine refugees should be allowed to join their brothers and sisters in their homeland, where they will be most welcomed and cared for.

Regrettably, however, Israel, the occupying Power, has callously rejected this appeal, even in the face of the grave tragedies the refugees are enduring and even in the midst of the calls from throughout the international community for countries to offer safe haven and refuge to the thousands of refugees fleeing the conflict. The Palestinian leadership is thus compelled to bring this most urgent issue to your attention once again and to appeal for any and all efforts possible to support our request and facilitate this matter. Israel's intransigence can neither be accepted nor justified as we collectively seek to uphold our responsibilities and to respond to this massive humanitarian emergency. Israel should not be allowed to prevent us from bringing our refugees to safety in their own homeland. In this regard, we stress that Israel bears a moral, political and legal responsibility for the plight of the Palestine refugees and the grave injustices they have borne since they were forcibly uprooted from their homes in the 1948 *Nakba*, which continues to this day as Israel continues to prevent their return, in blatant violation of their human rights and the relevant United Nations resolutions, primarily resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

It is incomprehensible that for nearly seven decades the Palestine refugees have been denied their rights, foremost their right to return to their homes to live peaceably alongside their neighbours, and have suffered repeated crises, displacement, dispossession and tragedies as they have patiently awaited a just solution. While we continue to seek that just solution, in accordance with resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative and in the context of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine as a whole, we call on the international community to help us to spare the Palestine refugees more undue suffering and to support the effort to bring the Palestine refugees fleeing the Syrian crisis to Occupied Palestine as a matter of humanitarian, moral and political urgency.

I would be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as an official document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36 and 50 of the 69th session, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations